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# Long-awaited Polly Rosenbaum State Archives and History building debuts Jan. 15

Phoenix Business Journal - by [Jan Buchholz](#)

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Arizona historians and preservationists are savoring the \$38 million Polly Rosenbaum State Archives and History Building, which recently was completed near the state Capitol and will be dedicated Jan. 15.

The 140,000-square-foot building at 1901 W. Madison St., named after a state lawmaker who served for 45 years, has been more than 20 years in the making. Political issues, budgetary restrictions and three cycles of economic downturns contributed to the delays.

A group of undeterred activists is credited with reviving the project every time it was sent to the bottom of the state priority list.

"This was ... a citizen-driven process that included genealogists, professional historians, attorneys and researchers," said Doug Kupel, president of the **Friends of Arizona Archives**, a nonprofit organization created in 1997. The group lobbied for construction of a building that would preserve Arizona's historical documents, including private letters of Arizona's pioneers, government papers, court records, artwork and cultural artifacts.

"Many of us were upset for a long time about how Arizona's documents were being preserved," Kupel said.

Concerns about storing important documents in the attic of the state Capitol first were raised in a 1983 report, he said. At the time, the report was enough to convince state legislators to fund a structure to preserve delicate items that had been subject to fluctuations of temperature and humidity.

"But then there was the 1987 stock market crisis," Kupel said. Turmoil in then-Gov. Evan Mecham's office, along with budget issues, landed the proposed archive building on the back burner. Ten years later, the project was still in limbo.

"Our group got together in 1997 because nothing had been done," Kupel said. "We created a nonprofit to raise awareness of the problem."

From that point, it took four years to get funding.

Then, the unfortunate events of 9/11 sidetracked the project again.

Finally, in 2004, the archive and museum building was funded. The process moved forward, with Phoenix-based **DWL Architects** chosen for the complex design. **Gilbane Building Co.**, a Providence, R.I.-based construction and logistical firm, was picked to manage the project, and Minneapolis-based **Mortenson Construction** built it.

Construction began in November 2006 and was completed in October 2008. The building was named after Polly Rosenbaum, who served in the state Legislature for 45 years and died in 2004 at age 104.

Official state historian Marshall Trimble, who called Rosenbaum a "dear personal friend for many years," said she worked long and hard for the creation of such an archive facility.

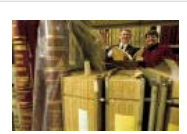
"When historical records are allowed to be lost through theft or poor preservation, we all lose something precious," Trimble said. "These records are part of our heritage and who we are."

Moving an estimated 300,000 boxes of material from the Capitol and several other storage sites was completed in stages during the past several months. Items were moved by truck to the new building, then loaded onto platforms that ran along nearly 2.2 miles of tracks into the building. Nearly 15.5 miles of movable shelving is in place at the building.

"It was a very technical move," said Beca Kulinovich, transition executive for Gilbane.

State historians and museum curators are adapting to their new domicile and enjoying access to thousands of previously unavailable items.

"It will take us time to get used to the long hallways and large pods and knowing where everything is," said Melanie Sturgeon, Arizona state archivist. "But this is going to be so much better."



Jim Poulin/Phoenix Business Journal

Doug Kupel, president of the Friends of Arizona Archives, left, and Melanie Sturgeon, Arizona state archivist, relish the accessibility of historic documents and artifacts at the newly completed Polly Rosenbaum State Archives and History Building.

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She said it's a relief to know so much of Arizona's past will be preserved in an environment that remains steady at 55 degrees and humidity of 30 percent to 40 percent.

Kupel, a city of Phoenix historian, also is relieved after his long, arduous fight.

"Everyone has done a tremendous job," he said. "It's an incredibly unique building, and Arizona is fortunate to have it."

**Event Facts**

What: Dedication of the Polly Rosenbaum State Archives and History Building

When: 9 a.m. Jan. 15

Where: 1901 W. Madison St., Phoenix

Tours: 10 a.m. to noon

Web: [www.lib.az.us/polly](http://www.lib.az.us/polly), [www.faza.net](http://www.faza.net)

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